

Suggestions for a Revised Pharmacopœia.

An address delivered before the Pharmaceutical Society by Prof. Claparès.

In introducing these to you, I deem it advisable to bring before you a slight sketch of the history and objects of a Pharmacopœia. A Pharmacopœia literally means the art of the drug-componder, but in its modern technical interpretation it denotes a book for the identification of simple and the preparation of compound medical agents which is published by the authority of a Government or of a medical or pharmaceutical society. The name has also been applied to similar compendiums issued by private individuals; the most conspicuous example of this in our country is Martindale's "Extra Pharmacopœia."

The term "Pharmacopœia" first appears as a distinct title in a work published at Basle in 1561, by Dr. A. Foes; but it does not appear to have come into general use till the beginning of the seventeenth century, for until 1617 such drugs and medicines as were in common use were sold in England by the apothecaries and grocers. In that year the apothecaries obtained a separate licence, and it was enacted that no grocer should keep an apothecary's shop. The preparation of physicians' prescriptions was thus confined to the apothecaries, upon whom pressure was brought to bear in order to make them dispense accurately by the issue of a Pharmacopœia in May, 1618, by the College of Physicians. Further, the wardens of the apothecaries received, in common with the censors of the College of Physicians, the power of examining the shops of apothecaries within seven miles of London, and destroying all compounds which they found unfaithfully prepared. This was the first authorized London Pharmacopœia, and the medicaments in it were selected chiefly from the works of Megne and Nicolaus de Salerno, with a few additions from those of other authors then in repute. This edition contained so many errors that the whole of it was cancelled, and a fresh one was published in the following December. Further editions of this Pharmacopœia were issued in 1632, 1639, and 1677, and these additions contained some most heterogeneous compounds. The fourth addition of a book published in 1691, by WILLIAM SALMON, PROFESSOR OF PHYSICK, at the Blue Balcony, by the Ditchside, nigh Holborne Bridge, is a commentary upon the Pharmacopœia then existing, with remarks upon some preparation found useful by him; or, as he expresses it, "Some choice medicines added by the Author." It is divided into six parts:

1. Natures and properties of all sorts of roots, barks, woods, herbs, flowers, fruits, seeds, gums and juices.

2. The qualities and virtues of all sorts of living creatures, taken from man, beasts, fowls, fish, serpents, insects, and their several parts.

3. The preparations, powers, and operations of all sorts of minerals and metals, semi-metals, salts, sulphur, stones, earths, and waters.

In the fourth and fifth parts are contained the chief compound officinal medicaments both external and internal.

In the sixth and last part the author says:—"We have added the Praxis Chymica or Modus Medicamentorum Preparandi; wherein, in a few words, we have delivered the sum and substance of great volums, and, as in a glass, represented to your view the reduction of Hercules his labors."

It is sometimes useful to compare a modern with a past age, and I shall claim your indulgence for a few minutes in indicating very briefly what our forefathers trusted to in the treatment of disease. On looking over its pages one is struck with the paucity of diseases and the formidable array of remedies. Thus the diseases all told amount to fifty-five, and the remedies for these are not fewer than 4,362. The ingredients entering into some of the formulæ are disgusting, for they contain the excrements of human beings, dogs, mice, geese; also calculi, human skull and moss growing on it, earthworms. Now let me give you examples of these old officinal drugs.

Fæces—Stercus—Dung is an emollient anodyne and maturant. Being applied it opens plague-sores, and dried, powdered, and mixed with honey, it cures inflamed wounds and quinsies. The ashes take away the pain caused by witchcraft.

Spittle—Fasting spittle rubbed on oftentimes cures pimples, also the stinging of serpents and the biting of mad dogs.

Calculus.—Stone taken from the kidneys or bladder. When powdered it dissolves and dispels the stone and gravel from all parts and opens obstructions.

Cranium.—The skull. "It is a specific in the cure of most diseases of the head, but chiefly the falling sickness; you may give it either levigated on a marble or calcined, or some of the following preparations thereof; the triangular bone on the temples is the most specific against the epilepsie." The preparations are a magisterium, an extract from Paracelsus, a tincture, a water, and a salt.

Lumbricus.—The earthworm. From earthworms were prepared an aqua, powder, liquor, and oil. "The aqua distilled is excellent against the dropsie; the powder glues together broken bones and draws things out of the flesh; the oil helps pains of the nerves and joints; and the oil mixt with raddish water, when given, invariably provokes urine and sweat."

Almost every known insect was supposed to have special properties, the only exception being *Pulex*—the flea. "They have no physical virtues known, but they are certainly troublesome guests; they are generated by dust, as also by putrid sweat. The only remedy to destroy them is the pulp or decoction of coloquintida."

THE THREE PHARMACOPŒIAS.

For fifty years the Pharmacopœia contain these and similar astounding formulæ was the official standard of English practise—a fact we can hardly now realise—and it was not until 1721 that an edition published under the auspices of Sir Hans Sloane showed marked alterations. Then many ridiculous remedies previously in use were omitted, although a good number were still retained, such as earthworms and the human skull.

A great improvement was effected in the edition published in 1788. Greater deletions were made, the extremely compound medicines which had formed the principal remedies of physicians for two thousand years were discarded, while a few powerful drugs which had been considered to be too dangerous to be included in the Pharmacopœia of 1765 were restored to their former position.

The last edition of the London Pharmacopœia was published in 1851. But it was not the only Pharmacopœia in Great Britain, for the first Edinburgh Pharmacopœia was published in 1699, and the last in 1841; while the first Dublin one was published in 1807, and the last in 1850.

The preparations contained in these three Pharmacopœias were not uniform in strength—a source of much inconvenience and danger to the public when powerful preparations were ordered in one country and dispensed according to the national Pharmacopœia in another. Hence a provision was inserted into the Medical Act of 1858 by which it was ordained that a General Medical Council should cause to be published under their direction a list of medicines and compounds and such other matters and things relating thereto as the General Council should see fit, and the list was to be called

THE BRITISH PHARMACOPŒIA.

The last edition of this Pharmacopœia appeared in 1885, and its Supplement in 1890. It is now an open secret that another edition will be issued within the next two years. With reference to the suggestions, a list of which is in your hands, I may say that three years ago a pharmacopœial committee was appointed by the Therapeutic Committee of the British Medical Association. This committee consisted of Professor Leech, Manchester; Professor Whitla, Belfast; and myself. We have never met to discuss our views, but Professor Leech submitted to me two years ago a list of deletions which I endorsed and supplemented, and it is with reference to these and other suggestions of my own that your opinion is asked.

DELETIONS SUGGESTED FOR NEW BRITISH PHARMACOPŒIA.

F. P. signifies French Pharmacopœia; G. P., German Pharmacopœia; U. S. P., United States Pharmacopœia.

Ammonii nitras, ammonii phosphas.—In U. S. P. Never prescribed.